

## LUIZ CAMILLO OSORIO IN CONVERSATION WITH VIVIAN CACCURI

**Well, Vivian, I believe we should start with your background. Was it in music or visual arts? Or perhaps a different one? How has such an intense intersection between the fields of sound and visuality developed?**

Those two forms of expressions were present in my life since a very early age; there are many musicians in my family. My grandmother is a pianist; my grandfather was a percussionist and an enthusiastic admirer of music, my uncle had a Reggae band; in sum, I grew up in a multicultural environment. Moreover, I had a more reclusive personality, drew obsessively, invented installations at home and school using whatever I could find. And since I was a kid, I liked listening to albums, to the radio; I also liked recording tapes. As a teenager, I would spend the night surfing the Internet, on Napster, Souseek, and Audiogalaxy, downloading electronic music, drum 'n' bass, dub... But I also heard a lot of rock, noise. During my college years, it was just natural that I directed myself towards a more performative and sonorous side, also as a result of an intensive exchanged with the musicians who attended the same philosophy as did. It was a mess. The intersection came as a natural part of the process – I am always listening to music, playing several instruments, composing, dancing, accompanying scenes – there is no way this would not be reflected in the works, once it is all part of my everyday life.

**In *O que faço é música (What I do is music)*, a publication that resulted from your research for you master's degree, both at UFRJ and Princeton (I haven't read yet, but really want to do it soon), you discuss the history the dialogue between Brazilian art and music; artists who are choosing to work with vinyl – in the cases of Cildo and Waltercio – and more effectively with sound sculpture, as is the case of Chelipa. How did your research develop and how did it help you to find a place in this space of sonic-visual convergence?**

This research provided me with several insights about vinyl, something with which I really enjoyed working. In addition to delving deeper into the work of those artists and into the history of Brazilian art, I could better understand how it all began in the world of music as well: how the first albums arrived in Brazil, how the music industry was structured, how it became profitable, who were the individuals behind the successes and failures, and so on. I became obsessed with the story of Frederich Figner, the guy who actually brought the first phonograph to Brazil and founded Odeon, our first label. It's a story that combines courage, magic, money, spirituality, travels to the Amazon, cleverness, a narrative almost hard to believe in, but one that worked. A very interesting aspect is the technical data regarding the production of the records of these artists. It's really good to think about how they had to "disrupt" an entire factory to make albums that were not the standard, and how these factories and engineers agreed to carry on these crazy projects. Brazil really managed to surprise in the 70's and 80's, because there was still some space for experimentation on the radio, on TV, in the recording studio.

However, I do not know exactly how this research helped me to find a place as an artist or as something else... writing it was very difficult because, although I like to research and write, writing is not my main creative drive. However, my master's degree would also help me to structure myself and get more opportunities to earn my living without having to accept jobs that had no relation to what I was interested in. Eventually, the effort was worth it; I published a book, I made a video called "Talking Machine," which is a "visual version" of the publication. But I'll tell you one thing: what the research really helped me do was give me lots of good histories to tell...

**For years I've had a close contact with Guilherme Vaz, a great inventor in the experimental music, with very a powerful presence in the field of visual arts as well. An artist who circulated through the cinema (Bressane and Sergio Bernardes), experimental music (he was close to Smetak) and deep Amerindian anthropology, with his journeys of decades through the Brazilian forests and hinterland. One thing that called my attention was that, if on the one hand, he acted out of radical freedom, on the other, he endured loneliness and invisibility. The fact that he did not belong anywhere made him a nomad, with no territory to call his own. Do you, who act on similar circuits, perceive the same kind of risk, in which freedom and the possibility of going astray might lead to isolation?**

I greatly admire the trajectory of Guilherme Vaz, and there is no way I could compare my history to what he accomplished along his life. But I do understand what you are trying to say. What I can tell you is not going to be anything compared to what he felt, because I've known just part of his work, and know little or almost nothing of the suffering he endured, but I imagine what he could have felt for the nature of his art, for this radical freedom, etc.

What I can tell you, as someone who works with sound and music, is that I like to think that I will have people watching and listening to my work, and I am concerned about it. It's quite a responsibility. I've heard many visual artists disregard this concern, finding it unnecessary, even naive. I disagree. I think we are living in urgent times, all efforts matter, so I am interested in matters/marginalized forms, taboos, and the reinvention of the concrete reality that is indeed going to find interlocutors. My works begin with recognizable elements, for example, mosquitoes, the Catholic Church, automotive sounds, Gospel music, psychic reading, a deep sound, a corrupt contractor, etc. This interlocutor may or may not identify with the way I express myself, or with the place from which I leave/speak; now, that's a different problem.

Often, however, what works regarding concepts, forms, and place of speech is not as valued regarding musical/sound. For example, I produce all the sounds, tracks, and songs of my works, and often this is treated merely as additional information, a trivial or minor thing, because the focus is on the vision, the sculpture, the concept. I've once participated in an exhibition that had sound as its main subject, but it simply massacred the sound experience of all the works that were inside the museum. This means that sound didn't matter, let alone the time/affection/love I dedicated to its production for months. There are several reasons for this: the code of contemporary art tends to marginalize the sound largely because it is unaware of how it is made/conceived/produced, and there is also the conditioning of an increasingly short-sighted

and brief attention and a type of sensitivity that wants to consume the works and “gain” something out of it, no matter what: status, likes on Instagram, a good photo, etc. In the case of sound, you will seldom “gain” something because you can hardly capture sound as a thing. It’s a closer to a spiritual experience.

I also often feel the issue of my gender, because there is still the notion that it is not common for women to be the author of sounds; therefore, many people do not even assimilate the information that I could be the composer of my own work (yes, it has happened!).

Anyway, I share with Guilherme Vaz this sense of radical freedom that he must have felt when composing. Whenever I’m composing, starting a new piece, combining tones, testing rhythms, organizing, I often don’t even remember how it all happened. I really experience freedom, and it’s a feeling which I always want to come back to, although it’s so complete that it’s a bit scary, so I proceed carefully. And I find this place of freedom so difficult to explain and, at the same time, so wonderful, that I want to share it, so I create situations, moments and the environment to try and take more people to a place that can be both personal and collective at the same time.

**On your site, next to the work *Tropicália transposed to Brazil Post-TV*, there is a question I consider quite interesting: “How much did the *Tropicalistas* becoming media stars kept them away from an earthlier transformation of MPB into an anthropophagic, oral, and ritualistic potency?” Nuno Ramos says something similar when he suspects that “*Tropicalismo* has naturalized our cultural industry to a point of no return,” and that “the cycle of democratic achievements from this operation has been over for decades.” I would tend to say that the naturalization of the cultural industry by lowering our popular production if that indeed happened, occurred in spite of *Tropicalismo*. Anyway, I think this is important, and I would like to hear what you have to say about it.**

Well, I consider my generation (the millennials) very arrogant, but also very curious and challenging, they want to reinvent things – or see themselves as inventors – but actually, they don’t like to get their hands dirty in the real world; they remain in the digital world, in a world of ideas, apps, Facebook posts, and perhaps because of it’s all happens so incredibly fast, we create both bad and interesting things at the same time. It is possible that my willingness to make a bonus track for the 1968 album “Gilberto Gil,” which I find extremely difficult to hear, came from this energy. It was like, “Maybe I can work on a “*Tropicália* reviewed” by remixing some things I have at home.” It was no easy task; on the contrary, it was a quite difficult one. The album has wonderful lyrics, heart-breaking melodies in eight, but an extremely interrupted rhythm; it is full of images, grandiloquent, perfect for TV. What I did was to make a track where a very slow cadence of “Pé da Roseira” mingled with the moans of “Questão de Ordem” and the chorus of “Domingo no Parque,” adding a djembe drum solo played by me. The track is a great trance, much closer to axé, to Earth, to rituals. Things that, at the time, Brazil wanted to keep at a distance.

The *Tropicalistas* invented a Brazil that I love and to whose image I am very much attached, an idea that is still vivid and pulsating. But if the Brazilian recording industry had not bet on a

largely international catalogue in the 70's, focusing on a few dozen domestic names to maximize profits, what would have happened to the Brazilian culture and the depiction of those artists in popular imagery? I see the enormous obstacle faced by my fellow researchers who are trying to recover popular music that was not recorded during that period or before that. In a mediatic world, this culture becomes invisible and does not bear fruit, has no children, has no influence; it is restricted to its radius of oral impact. Adorno tried to warn us about it, but the media were more seductive.

We import the American massification models, but we do not import the models that gave more "capillarity" to the distribution of regional or niche cultures. For instance, a phenomenon such as Motown was never possible in Brazil because we were even more miserable, unfair and racist: Motown was a record label with a Black owner, run by Blacks, recording Black artists and a city where Blacks were factory workers (Detroit). Berry Gordie Jr., despite all the controversy, disclaimers and criticisms directed to him, managed to create a business model that nationalized the Black music of the United States, opening doors to several other artists and, as a result, other smaller Black record labels.

There was never such a phenomenon in Brazil. Similar things happened in the Caribbean, especially in Jamaica, but not here. Our recorded music was born controlled by large American and European multinational companies, run by White men who determined the number of Brazilian artists that should be recorded. And despite all the "brotherhood" and "Sentimentalization of the Exchange" (as Mangabeira Unger says) that took place in recording companies, the power relationship there was also visible in the color of skin/nationality of those who were in charge and those who were paid. Then, long live Tim Maia. He's a hero, and his label, Vitória Régia, was a disrupting, visionary and profound idea.

I do understand what Nuno Ramos meant. According to everything I could read and hear from those who experienced the period, there was, at the time, a golden opportunity to revolutionize and bring much more of Brazil to the surface. It's a different time we are living now, both horrible and interesting, and there is currently a broad debate about the empowerment of women and the end of the denial of racism with young and very talented artists. We are experiencing a new logic in the phonographic market; it is too early to say how dependent we are on the digital giants (Apple, Google, Spotify, YouTube), and which of the new Brazilian music cultures is in fact sustainable.

**I was delighted with the work *Nosso Sentimento*, in which the articulation of Gilberto Gil's and Mutombo Da Poet 's (from Ghana) voices happens in such a lyrical and powerful way at the same time... There is a combination of sweetness and friction that seems to translate very well the Brazil-Africa dialogue and our Afro-Brazilian tradition that has suffered so much. This sound experience allows us to deal sensorially with issues of contemporary history and geopolitics. Could you tell us a little about this work and the Homa project?**

*Nosso Sentimento* was born out of my huge admiration for the work of Gilberto Gil, with whom I was fortunate enough to work in 2012 in the commemorative exhibition of his 70 years of age.

Since then, I like to rethink the cultural meaning of some of his songs; “Você e Você” is the one song I’ve used for this work. My work was born out of a simple observation of a device that is common in the American suburbs: a stereo system for gardens that imitates two stones so that they can be camouflaged in the middle of the plants. Observing one of them, I realized that it reminded me of the rocks at Arpoador, in Rio. I imagined that the other rock could be another shore, the other margin of the ocean.

Mutombo da Poet was one of the persons I met during the month I spent in Accra, Ghana’s capital city. The way he writes and the aggressiveness of his presence and voice touched me deeply; they were not very common traits in the artists I met there. I thought his style was a beautiful opposite of Gilberto Gil’s Bossa Nova in “Você e Você”: a very loud and powerful voice, without melody, crudely African. I sent Gil’s song to Mutombo via WhatsApp and translated its lyrics. I proposed that Mutombo reacted to Gil’s song and to some very particular impressions that I had had during my trip to Accra, being the main one the feeling of never really having crossed the Atlantic, as if there were things that are insurmountable, Incomprehensible, contacts that will never actually happen because they are just not viable. The physical result on me was a great nausea, a sea voyage vertigo, and as an image, I could create a false impression that the stones are moving.

Mutombo produced an amazing text. My role was to edit the recording so that it would become a dialogue with Gil. I treated their voices and composed the instrumental lines and field recordings that would translate this feeling of nausea, melancholy, and distance. The installation was composed of these two stones painted in white, several other stones and medium-sized tree trunks cut and also painted white, creating a kind of geography/territory. On top of them all, Umbanda candles of several entities, therefore in several colors, were lit and melted, staining the white paint.

Now, “Homa” is my musical alter ego, the feminine form for “homo.” I’ve created this persona for the occasions on I want to release albums that are not related to artistic projects or installations, for when I play as a DJ or when I produce someone or some track. I felt intensely the need to have a non-body world, an exit door from the universe of things and objects, to have the place of pure sound. It is very difficult to combine the two artistic personas with the same intensity, but everything that does not fit into one ends up feeding the other, and for the past two years we have produced and composed many hours of music.